

TIP TOP WEEKLY

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FRANK MERRIWELL'S FATE

OR

THE OLD SAILOR'S
LEGACY.



By the Author
of

FRANK MERRIWELL.

AS THE NIGHT WAS VERY DARK, THE ASSAILANTS HAD BEEN ABLE TO CREEP CLOSE IN UPON THE SENTRIES.

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FRANK MERRIWELL'S FATE; OR, THE OLD SAILOR'S LEGACY.

By the Author of "FRANK MERRIWELL."

CHAPTER I.

AN EVENTFUL NIGHT.

There was trouble brewing at Fardale Military Academy.

Hugh Bascomb was under arrest and confined in the guard-tent, charged with brutally assaulting and beating Rupert Reynolds, without cause or provocation.

Reynolds had not been seriously injured, but he declined to tell how the affair came about. It was found to be quite useless to question him.

Nor did Bascomb seem inclined to talk much. When closely questioned, he simply answered:

"I will tell a few things at the regular investigation."

These words were repeated to Reynolds, and they seemed to make him look decidedly anxious and uneasy.

Reynolds became restless. He moved about through the encampment when at liberty to do so, and was seen talking earnestly in low tones to several of his particular friends.

Bart Hodge noted these movements,

and, happening to come upon Frank Merriwell, he said:

"There's something in the wind, old man."

"What is it—air?" asked Frank, with a twinkle in his merry eyes, and a faint smile on his face.

"I'm not chaffing."

"No? Then what's up?"

"I don't know just what it is, but Reynolds is in it."

"He seems to be in everything lately."

"He's up to some kind of a game. You know he refused to tell why Bascomb thumped him?"

"Yes."

"Well, he is collaring all his friends and talking them into the ear-ache. That means something."

Frank nodded.

"You're right; Reynolds always calls on his friends when he gets into a scrape."

"But he doesn't seem to be in any scrape. Bascomb is the one who—"

"Remember that Bascomb promised to

tell a few things at the regular investigation."

"Well?"

"It's my opinion Reynolds had a great deal rather Bascomb would not tell."

"What has that to do with the way he is running round and chinning his friends?"

"Possibly a good deal. He may be trying to scratch up evidence to refute any charge Bascomb makes."

"Or he may be up to something else."

"What?"

"That I don't know, but I've got an idea that Reynolds is desperate, and ready for anything. I'd give something to find out what kind of a scheme he is trying to work."

"Keep cool, and we will find out later on."

"I suppose that's all we can do."

It was true that Reynolds worked very hard among his friends, or those who pretended to be his friends. Rupert had money to spend freely, and he had gathered about himself a number of boy sycophants, who were ready to show extreme friendliness as long as the money lasted. There was no heart or sincerity in this kind of friendship, but it seemed the only kind of regard that Reynolds was able to win.

Rupert had not ceased to dislike Frank Merriwell thoroughly, although Frank had spared him at a time when exposure of a certain contemptible trick would have meant disgrace and dismissal for him.

Bascomb liked Frank no better than did Rupert, and these two lads had seemed to be the very best of friends up to the

time that Reynolds received the beating at Bascomb's hands.

Bascomb had allowed a burst of temper to get the best of him, and he had shown very poor judgment in attacking Rupert within the confines of the cadet encampment, where he had been quickly dragged from his victim and placed under arrest.

Merriwell had other foes in the academy, but they were not so prominent as Bascomb and Reynolds. The latter had tried to play the hypocrite, and appear friendly to Frank, but his duplicity had been discovered, and he had not nerve to continue the shallow artifice.

Hodge's words caused Frank to note Rupert's movements, and he saw that the fellow was really up to something. He had more or less difficulty in bringing his friends to his way of thinking, but he appeared to succeed in almost every case.

At supper there were rumors of a great lark to come, but what it meant only a select few of the cadets seemed to know.

"They were to find out that night."

Bascomb slept in the guard-tent, with armed sentries on the four sides.

Thirty minutes before the time to relieve the guard arrived, the sentries were assailed by overwhelming numbers.

As the night was very dark, the assailants had been able to creep close in upon the sentries without being challenged, and had attacked them at a signal agreed upon.

It is possible some of the sentries were in the plot, for the resistance, with a single exception, seemed feeble.

One fellow fought savagely, discharg-

ing his gun, and shouting for the officer of the guard.

But while he was fighting, the assaulting party accomplished their purpose, and he was finally knocked down and left dazed and stunned, while the assailants disappeared as swiftly as they had appeared.

It was all over when Lieutenant Gordan and the officer of the guard arrived on the scene.

A hurried investigation showed that Bascomb was gone.

He had been set at liberty, or carried away!

"Turn out the entire camp!" raged Lieutenant Gordan. "This is outrageous! Somebody shall suffer for this piece of work!"

In another moment, bugles sounded, and the muffled roar of drums was heard.

The long roll was given, and, in obedience to this signal, the cadets came hurrying from their tents, to fall in, in class companies, on the parade ground.

The roll was called.

Then it was found that ten cadets failed to answer to their names.

Reynolds, Bascomb, Snell, and Harris were among the missing.

Lieutenant Gordan, who was thoroughly aroused and angered, gave orders for the arrest of every one of the ten.

But not one of them all returned to their tents that night, and in the morning they were still absent from camp.

Once, years before, there had been a revolt among the cadets at Fardale Academy, and it began to look as if something of the kind had occurred again.

Now it was plain enough to both Merri-

well and Hodge what Reynolds had been doing the previous afternoon and evening.

The attack on the guard-tent and release of the prisoner had been planned by Rupert, who was the leader of the movement.

Every one of his comrades in the attack were fellows who did not bear the best of reputations and whose records since entering the academy had not been of the best order.

Some of them were cadets who had barely escaped dismissal on various occasions, and who seemed to court such a fate in this case.

Two or three were weak-minded fellows who were easily influenced by Reynolds.

Lieutenant Gordan declared that not one of the ten should escape just and proper punishment.

Without delay, he instructed Frank Merriwell to form a picked company of twenty cadets, and go in pursuit of the rebels.

"Take twenty men you can depend on, Mr. Merriwell," he said, "and do not return to camp until you have effected the capture of the deserters."

CHAPTER II.

SAILOR JACK.

Frank was well pleased to think he had been selected to take charge of the force that was going in pursuit of the rebels, and he was still more pleased when Lieutenant Gordan directed him to select his company for the expedition.

It did not take him long to decide on the twenty cadets he preferred. Among them were Bart Hodge, Barney Mulroy,

Hans Dunnerwust, Ephraim Gallup and Fred Davis.

The last two mentioned were plebes, but Davis had shown his unswerving loyalty to Frank, and Ephraim seemed reliable. He was a Vermonter, and Frank fancied that he would greatly aid Dunnerwust, the Dutch boy, in providing amusement for the company.

As the very first movement, Hodge and Mulloy were sent out as scouts to discover whither the deserters had gone.

Mulloy was gone less than two hours when he returned and reported that the rebels seemed to have fled in the direction of Blue Lake, a large sheet of water about five miles away.

Frank waited a while for Hodge, but Bart did not show up, and further delay was not thought advisable, so the company marched away, escorted to the limits of the academy grounds by the cadet drum corps and two of the regular companies. The drum corps played a lively march, and the cadets were permitted to give a farewell cheer, as Frank marched his picked command away.

Frank had requested Lieutenant Gordan to send Hodge on after them, if he showed up at camp.

Frank chose the shortest route to Blue Lake.

On the northern shore of this sheet of water lay a large strip of forest, known as Ten-Mile Woods. From Barney's report, Frank was led to believe the deserters had fled to the shelter of this wild section.

Frequent inquiries along the road failed to give any satisfaction till near noon, when they came to a farm-house within half a mile of the lake.

The farmer informed them that a party of ten cadets, who said they were on a vacation, had taken breakfast there. He had thought it strange that boys on a vacation should be carrying muskets, and nine of them were thus armed.

One of them had paid for what they had eaten, and then they purchased potatoes, flour, pork, beans, salt, pepper, coffee, and other provisions of him, together with a kettle, frying-pan, coffee-pot, and so forth.

When he heard this, Frank looked serious, for it was evident that the deserters were determined on a genuine rebellion, having no thought of returning to the academy for some time.

Although the farmer had been pretty well cleaned out of food and provisions, his wife agreed to get up some kind of a dinner for the boys, if they would wait for her to cook it.

This Frank decided to do, and, while they were waiting for dinner, he held a council with all of his company, at which he informed them that Hodge was second in command, and would have full control whenever he was absent.

The boys were inclined to consider the whole affair a great lark, but, while he was enjoying it, Frank began to see that they had serious work before them.

Knowing their punishment would be severe in any case, and believing it would be no more severe if they took a vacation and refused to return to the academy until compelled to do so, they plainly meant to stay away as long as possible.

Frank wondered what could have become of Bart, as he had expected to meet him somewhere on the march.

It was some time past noon when the farmer's wife announced that dinner was ready for the first ten.

The meal consisted mainly of boiled potatoes, butter-gravy, stripped cod-fish, and corn-meal bread.

This fare was certainly of the plainest sort, but the boys took hold heartily, and they seemed to enjoy it immensely.

At one-thirty they took up the march again, soon reaching the lake and the edge of the Ten-Mile Woods.

Within sight of the lake lived a strange old fellow, who was a sort of a recluse. He had once been a sailor, and it was hinted by those who claimed to know that his record on the high seas would not bear close investigation. No one had the boldness to assert that he had once been a smuggler and pirate, but it was said that he knew a great deal about people who had followed such unlawful callings.

He had given his name as Jack Duff, and he was known in the vicinity as "Old Jack," or "Sailor Jack."

He was a fierce, grizzled old fellow, whose language was plentifully sprinkled with strange sailor oaths, and who always wore a belt, which supported a sheath that contained a long-bladed, murderous-looking knife.

Sometime in his career, Sailor Jack had lost his left leg near the knee, and he wore a wooden "peg" in place of the missing member.

His right eye was smaller than the left, and, when he was angry, seemed to glow like a coal.

It was said that Jack had been rather free with his money when he first settled near Blue Lake, but the fact that his

money was always in gold, and often in strange pieces of foreign countries, excited the curiosity of the people in that vicinity, some of whom ventured to ask him where he got it.

The old salt had resented their inquisitiveness, and he flatly told them it was none of their business.

After that he seemed to draw into his shell, like a turtle, and he grew to resent any attempt at friendliness, so that people came to fear and avoid him.

Regularly once a week he visited the grogcery in Fardale and purchased a supply of rum, for which he continued to pay in gold, and all the pieces being dated far back, it seemed to indicate they had been hoarded.

The story got around that Old Jack was the possessor of large treasure, which he had secreted somewhere about the wretched old house in which he lived.

The old sailor knew this story was in circulation, and he seemed to fear that he would be robbed. He regarded everybody with suspicion, and he became more and more cross and ugly as years advanced. More than once it had been declared that he would murder somebody in time, if he continued to grow suspicious and fierce.

This strange old fellow seemed to avoid as far as possible the sea coast, but he was not able to give up his sailor habits, and so, with great labor and pains, he built himself a small two-masted schooner, which he launched on Blue Lake.

Strangely enough, he named this schooner, "Captain Kidd," which caused the country people to regard him with still greater suspicion.

He had arranged running lines, so that

he could sit with his feet in the cock-pit his shoulder and pointing it at the lads—and his hand on the tiller and trim the "lay to, or, shiver my timbers, if I don't sails without leaving the helm.

Whenever a wild storm came up, Jack would repair aboard the schooner, get up anchor and sails, and go cruising around over the lake in a way that told how much he enjoyed such tempestuous sport. How he succeeded in handling the schooner all alone was more than could be told, but he did so, and he did not mind that the country people prophesied he would be drowned some day. Some of them would have been not a little relieved if this had actually happened, but Jack refused to be drowned, although the sails were blown out of the "Captain Kidd" once or twice.

There were lads in the academy who frequented Old Carter's grogillery in Far-dale village, and there they heard a great deal about Sailor Jack, so his history since his appearance in the neighborhood became well-known among the cadets.

The moment Frank came in sight of Old Jack's house, he recognized the place from descriptions he had received of it,

The boys marched briskly down the old road, little looking for what was to take place.

As they approached the house, Old Jack came round the corner and saw them. He paused and glared at them in amazement, and then he went stumping into the house as fast as his wooden peg would carry him.

In a moment he reappeared, and the boys were not a little surprised to see that he grasped a long-barreled, old-fashioned gun.

"Lay to, there, ye lubbers!" roared the man, bringing the breech of the gun to

his shoulder and pointing it at the lads—"lay to, or, shiver my timbers, if I don't give ye a broadside!"

CHAPTER III.

HODGE IN TROUBLE.

"Shimminy Gristmas!" gurgled Hans Dunnerwust, in great alarm. "Uf he don'd peen bointing dot gun sdraight ad me, you vos a liar!"

"G'wan, ye Dutch chaze!" cried Barney Mulloy. "Ye can't see straight, ye pal-pane! It's mesilf th' ould odamahon is pointing th' gun at."

"Wal, I be gol dinged if ye ain't both blind ez moles!" palpitated Ephraim Gal-lup, trying to dodge behind somebody else. "He's got that thunderin' ole' cannon p'intered at me!"

"Halt!" commanded Frank, promptly. The company having come to a halt, he addressed Sailor Jack:

"What is the meaning of this, sir?" came sternly from his lips. "You are liable to get yourself into serious trouble."

"Avast there!" rumbled the old tar, his right eye filled with a red fire. "I mean business, keelhaul me if I don't! I want pay for my dog and my windows, and I'll have it; or I'll give ye the contents of this gun, and you may lay to that, my hearties!"

"What have we to do with your dog and your windows? You are crazy, man!"

"If you didn't break my windows and shoot my dog, it was a lot of lubbers dressed like you, and you're all from the academy, so you will pay the damages."

Frank instantly understood that Reynolds and his gang had been pestering the old tar.

"It must have been the party we were sent out to capture," he said. "How did they happen to smash your windows and shoot your dog?"

"How did they happen to!" roared the sailor, fiercely. "They done it when I refused to let them have Cap'n Kidd to go sailing on the lake. Then they took to stoning the house and breaking out the windows. When I cast Gibbs adrift and sicked him at 'em, they shot him full of lead, shiver my timbers if they didn't!"

"Well, we have nothing to do with that. Those fellows revolted, and we were sent out after them."

"What's that? They're mutineers?"

"Yes."

"You're sure there're none of 'em with you?"

"Dead sure."

The old man seemed to hesitate a minute, and then, as he thought of the death of his dog, he grew furious again.

"You're all from the same vessel!" he snarled. "If I don't collect of you, I won't get anything at all, so you're going to pay for my windows and my dog before you hoist anchor and get under way again, and you may lay to that, my hearties!"

"But we refuse to pay for the damage done by those deserters. At the same time, if you will call at the academy, and present your claim to Professor Gunn, I have no doubt but he will see that you are remunerated for your loss."

"That don't go with me, mate. I believe in collecting when I have the chance, so fork over twenty dollars before I give you a broadside that will blow you clean out of the water."

"Will you listen to reason, or——"

"Hand over the cash, you lubber, and be lively about it! I am a bad man to fool with, and I may take a notion to shoot first and collect afterward."

Frank turned to his company.

"Prepare to load!"

His order rang out sharp and clear, and it was obeyed with mechanical accuracy.

"Load!"

Nineteen blank cartridges were snapped into nineteen guns.

Sailor Jack did not know the cartridges were blank, and he looked somewhat astonished and uneasy.

"What do you mean, you scoundrel?" he shouted.

"We are simply preparing for the emergency," replied Frank, coolly, not a smile changing the expression of his face, although he felt like laughing outright at the sudden change which had come over the sailor. "In case you fire into us, we are going to do a little shooting, too. You will have a lively time dodging nineteen bullets."

"Shiver my timbers!" gurgled Jack, hesitatingly. "You wouldn't dare to fire!"

"You will find you are greatly mistaken if you shoot into us."

"And you won't pay for my windows?"

"Not a window."

"Nor my dog?"

"Nary dog."

"And blow me if I don't believe you'd like an excuse to shoot me!" gasped the fierce old tar, who had been quite set back by the stand Merriwell had taken.

"Of all the murderous young cut-throats I ever saw, you're the worst! But I'll fool ye, keelhaul me if I don't! I won't give ye any excuse for shooting, but I'll get

even with ye some way, and you may lay fellows they were pursuing had entered to that, my hearties!"

Having thus delivered himself, Old Jack turned squarely about and pegged away, trying to appear as dignified as possible.

"That's the way to suppress a fierce and blood-thirsty pirate!"— laughed Frank. "He may take a fancy to shoot at us from some place of shelter, so we will move along.. Shoulder arms, forward, march!"

Away they went down the old road, more than half expecting the man with the gun would shoot after them; but he did nothing of the kind, and they passed without further trouble.

At the edge of the woods Frank halted his men.

"We have had no trouble in tracing the deserters thus far," he said. "It is likely they are somewhere in the shelter of this strip of forest, and we must find out just where they are. They are liable to be somewhere near the shore of the lake. Still they may have entered by this road. This road, as you can see, is seldom traveled. It was once the only road between Edgefield and Fardale, but there is now a shorter and more direct route, which causes the road through Ten-Mile Woods to be avoided. If ten men have marched into the forest by this road, they must have left marks on the ground, and some of us will be able to find those marks."

He then selected two lads besides himself, and they went forward to examine the road in search for the trail left by the deserters.

It was not long before they found all the trail they desired, making it plain the

fellows they were pursuing had entered the woods by that road.

While thus engaged, Frank fancied he heard a faint, far-away shout. They all listened, and, after a time, it was repeated.

"They are not far away," observed one of the boys. "I fancy that was one of them shouting."

"It sounded like a cry of distress," said Frank.

"Perhaps one of them has strayed away from the others and is lost."

"Possibly."

Having found that the deserters had entered the forest by way of the road, Frank lost little time in marching forward.

The company had not proceeded far before an old wood-road was seen leading off to the right toward the lake.

Another investigation showed that Reynolds and his friends had left the main road and taken to the wood-road.

And now the cries could be plainly heard at intervals, and, more than at first, they sounded like cries of distress.

Down the wood-road hurried Frank, at the head of the party.

There was a strangely familiar sound to those cries.

Some of the boys were for answering, but Frank would not allow this, as it might warn the enemy of their proximity.

In a very short time they were near to the person who was uttering the cries, and, despite the fact that this individual's voice was hoarse from much shouting, Frank believed he recognized it.

"Forward!" he commanded. "It is Hodge!"

"That's pwhat Oi thought mesilf," said

Barney Mulloy, excitedly. "Th' by's in some kind av a schrape."

They were now guided by the shouts, but did not find it necessary to abandon the old wood-road.

In a very short time they came in sight of a lad who was standing with his back to a tree, and, as they came nearer, they made a surprising discovery.

It was Bart Hodge, sure enough, and he was bound to the tree!

CHAPTER IV.

THE HERMIT.

Hodge gave a cry of relief when his eyes rested on his approaching comrades.

"Help!" he called, and, now that rescue was at hand, his voice sunk to a whisper.

Frank dashed forward.

"Bart, what does this mean? Who did this?"

"Set me free, old man. I am nearly dead from being tied up here so long."

Frank quickly produced a pocket-knife and cut the cords which held the unfortunate fellow to the tree. On being thus released, Bart collapsed and fell in a heap at the foot of the tree, while the excited and wondering boys gathered around him.

It was some moments before Hodge seemed in condition to talk, and then, sitting up and placing his back against the tree, he said:

"It seems as if I have been tied up here for a week. I didn't mind it at first, but it became the most painful torture after a while. I'd begun to think I'd never succeed in making anybody hear me. Oh, won't I get square for this!"

"How did it happen?" asked Frank.

"Who tied you to the tree?"

"The rebels."

"Rebels?"

"That's what they call themselves."

"Reynolds and his gang?"

"Yes."

"But how did they happen to have the opportunity to tie you up in such a manner?"

"I ran into an ambush."

"They found you were after them, and set a trap for you?"

"Just that."

"The scoundrels! I didn't think they would dare do such a thing."

"I didn't know I was anywhere near them till they suddenly sprang up all around me," Hodge explained. "I saw I was in a trap, but I did not propose to give up tamely, and so I tried to break away. I got a good crack at Bascomb, and I knocked him flat the first pop. But it wasn't any use, for they just jumped on me and crushed me down. I had to give up."

The boys were listening with breathless interest, and Frank urged Bart to go on.

"I didn't suppose they would dare punish me; but they held a sort of trial, and convicted me of being a spy. I was sentenced to be hanged. They had a big bundle, tied up with a rope. Part of the rope was taken off the bundle, and my hands were tied, for all that I fought. Then they made a noose, which they put around my neck, and pretended they really meant to hang me. But they could not scare me in that way, so Bascomb, whose left eye I buttoned up when I hit him, proposed that I be stripped to the

waist, tied to the tree, and whipped with withes. He was bound to make me beg. They fell to quarreling over this, for Reynolds was against it. It divided them into two parties, but Reynolds had five supporters, and Bascomb had three, so the big bully was forced to give in. Then it was decided that I should be tied up here and left till somebody released me. They tied me up, and I have been here ever since."

"When were you tied to the tree?"

"Some time this forenoon."

"And you have been there ever since! No wonder you were pretty well exhausted."

"It was terrible," declared Bart. "I wouldn't go through it again for a hundred dollars."

"Dot vos righd," nodded Hans, who had been listening with his mouth wide open. "I vos ruter haf a hundret tollars than do dot meinself."

"I told Bascomb I would be even with him," said Bart, "and I am going to keep my word."

"I should think they would fear punishment when they return to the academy."

"They don't mean to return till they are obliged to do so. Besides that, you know Bascomb hates me for an old score. He says I went back on him, and he wanted to tie me up and flog me to get even. He would have done it if it hadn't been for Reynolds; but Rupert was scared, and so I escaped."

"Which way did they go when they left you?"

"Toward the lake."

"Then we'll follow."

"I am not going to follow far till I have something to eat. I am nearly starved."

"I don't wonder. Davis."

"Yes, sir," promptly replied Fred Davis, stepping forward and saluting.

"Conduct Mr. Hodge to the farm-house where we took dinner. Tell the people there that it is barely possible we may call for supper."

"All right, sir."

In a few moments Bart and Fred were on their way back to the farm-house, while Frank led his company toward the lake.

Deep in the heart of the woods they came upon an old hut, from the chimney of which smoke was issuing.

"I wonder who lives there?" speculated Frank.

"Mebbe them gol darned rebels are in there," suggested Ephraim Gallup, nervously.

"It is possible. We will surround the house. Let no one escape. Forward!"

They dashed forward at a run and quickly surrounded the old hut.

The front door was partly open, and a small, cur-like dog stood in the opening, snarling and showing its teeth.

"Get out!" shouted Frank, making a kick at the dog.

The creature plunged into the hut and disappeared.

Merriwell hesitated but a moment, and then he pushed open the door and walked in, followed closely by Barney, Ephraim, and Hans.

The hut seemed to consist of but one room, at the farther end of which was an open fire, on which some green wood was smoldering and sending up a thick smoke. On the floor, or, rather, on the ground, in one corner was a wretched bed. There was a table, one chair, some blackened tin dishes hung around the walls, and that was about all.

The place seemed deserted.

"Howly shmoke!" gurgled Barney. "Pwhat's this mane, Oi dunno?"

"Shimimny Gristmas!" gurgled Hans. "Vot kindt uf a blace dis pee, ain'd id?"

"Don't seem to be nobody to hum," muttered Ephraim Gallup, in a scared whisper. "Guess we'd better be goin'."

"It must be the hut of Black Tom, the hermit, of whom such queer stories are told," said Frank.

"Thin, begobs, it's mesilf thot fales loike movin'," said Barney. "Oi'd rayther make a call on Sailor Jack, so Oi had."

"Yaw, dot vos so," gurgled Hans. "Dot Plack Dom he peen shut up a brison in, und he got avay ound py killing der guard, ain'd id?"

"That is the story they tell of him," affirmed Frank. "If all they tell about the old fellow is true, he would make a good mate for Sailor Jack."

"They lie! they lie! they lie!" quavered a feeble voice.

With exclamations of surprise, the boys turned to see between them and the door the bent form of an old man, who was leaning on a crooked cane, and at whose heels the wretched dog was crouching. The old man's hair and beard were white, and his hands trembled from old age. He presented a most pitiful spectacle of ruin, want, and wretchedness.

In strong contrast to his white hair and beard was his dark skin, which was wrinkled and flabby. His eyes, however, seemed to have retained the fire and brilliancy of youth, and they were very keen and piercing.

The old man was dressed in ragged clothes, and the boots on his feet were held together by strings. He wore no hat.

It was not surprising the boys were startled, for they had not seen the man when they entered, and he seemed to have materialized out of the air.

Several lads were looking in at the door of the hut, and they afterward declared they were unable to tell from

whence the old man had come. It seemed as if he had risen from out of the ground which composed the floor of the hut.

Frank Merriwell's nerves were not easily shaken, and he saw nothing to fear about the aged and feeble-appearing old man.

"We beg your pardon for intruding, sir," he said, with the respect and politeness due an aged person.

The man looked at him keenly, searchingly.

"You are the first one to beg Black Tom's pardon in years," he faltered, as if thoroughly astonished.

"Well, sir, I am quite aware we have no right here, and it is proper that we all beg your pardon."

"Right!" exclaimed the old hermit, bitterly. "Who considers the right of the weak and friendless!"

"I do, for one."

"Then you are an exception—you are a wonder. It is the way of the world to trample on the weak and helpless—to crush them. The world does not give a man any rights unless he is strong enough to defend them. Boy, what is your name?"

"Frank Merriwell."

"A good name, and that is a good face you have. I am something of a character-reader, although I may be old and wretched. I see fine things in that face—brave things, manly things, noble things! You are sincere in all you do, and you have great moral stamina and strength of character. In the battle of life, you are pretty sure to come forth a winner."

"Thank you."

"You have nothing to thank me for, Frank Merriwell, as I am simply telling you the truth, as revealed by your face. Frank is a good name, for it suggests openness, honesty, heartiness. Merriwell seems to suggest a jovial nature and a strong spirit. I believe I never before knew of a person whose name fitted him so well."

"By gum!" Ephraim Gallup was heard to whisper; "the old feller ain't no darn fool, arter all!"

As for Frank, he was not a little taken back by the words of the strange man of the woods, but he said:

"All I can ask is that you have read my character aright."

"I am sure of that," declared Black Tom. "Never in my life have I made a mistake in such matters. If I had seen by your face that you were a sneak and a scoundrel, I should have told you so just as readily. It is my frankness in such things that drove me to be what I am—an outcast and a hermit. Men who did evil things shunned me and turned other men against me. They seemed to think that I could read the black secrets of their hearts because they carried the truth written on their faces. Now they point me out with scorn, and say I am a criminal—that I am hiding from the grasp of the law."

The hermit's voice rose to a shrill cry, and he shook his cane angrily in the air, causing the boys to fall back. In doing this Hans tripped and sat down heavily on the ground, which brought a grunt from his lips.

"Atch! Dot came near mein prains to knock oudt!" he exclaimed.

Frank saw the hermit was getting excited, and, not knowing what the man might do, he fancied it would be best to move on as soon as possible. First, however, he would ask the old man if he had seen anything of the rebels, and he did so.

Immediately, Black Tom showed signs of mingled anger and alarm.

"Yes, I saw such a party," he acknowledged, although he seemed to do so reluctantly.

"How long ago?"

"Some hours."

"They passed this hut?"

"They stopped here a while."

"For what purpose?"

"To have sport with me!" cried the old

man, bitterly. "They thought it great fun to beat my dog and threaten to serve me the same."

These words seemed wrung from his lips against his will, as Frank observed. This aspect of fear aroused Merriwell's curiosity. He desired to know just what it meant.

"So they threatened you?" he asked.

"Yes," whispered the hermit, his eyes moving restlessly about.

"But they did you no personal injury?"

"No."

"And they all departed together?"

Black Tom was silent.

"Tell me the truth, man!" cried Frank. "Are they gone? Are you not hiding them near at hand?"

"They are gone."

"All of them?"

Again the hermit was silent, but Frank saw his eyes turn a flitting glance toward the peak of the hut, where some crossed poles and a thin layer of bark and brush made a small loft.

That was quite enough for Frank.

"Boys," he cried, "a spy has remained behind to listen to our conversation!"

"Where is he? Show him to us! We'll fix him!"

"Dot vos richt! Show me to him!" bellowed Hans, in great excitement. "Oh, he won't do a thing to me!"

"He is within reach," declared Frank.

"Let me put me hand on th' spalpane!" shouted Barney.

"Fix bayonets!" ordered Merriwell.

Clatter, rattle, snap!

"See the loft up there? You can all reach it, and your bayonets will pierce the bark and brush. If the spy is there, he'll be likely to get prodded. Ready to stir him up!"

The boys made ready.

Before Frank could give the command, however, a shrill cry of terror rang through the hut, following which a portion of the loft gave way, and down came

a sprawling human figure amid a mass of bark and broken poles.

CHAPTER V.

THINGS MYSTERIOUS.

The person who had fallen thus scrambled to his feet as soon as he struck the ground, attempting to rush out of the hut.

"Seize him!" cried Frank.

A broken pole had struck Ephraim Gallop on the head and knocked him down. The Vermonter was on the ground, but he was within easy reach of the spy's feet, and he clutched one of them, crying:

"Hold right on there, b'gosh! Don't be in sech a gol dinged rush!"

The spy was tripped up, but he jerked his foot from Ephraim's grasp, and again scrambled up and made a break for the door.

He ran plump into Hans Dunnerwust, who fastened to the fellow with a desperate clutch, and down they went together, the Dutch boy squawking:

"Hellup! hellup! Shimminy Gristmas! Uf I don'd hellup you I vos a deat man alretty yet!"

Ready hands clutched the spy, who was dragged to his feet, and the boys obtained a fair look at his face.

"Wat Snell!" cried Frank.

Wat Snell it was, and he looked thoroughly frightened and ashamed.

"Dud-dud-don't hurt me, bub-bub-bub-boys!" he quavered, his knees shaking beneath him.

Frank immediately saw an opportunity to have some sport, and give Wat a bad scare at the same time.

"You shall have a fair trial, Snell," he said, "and, if you can prove your innocence, you'll not be hanged."

"Oh, say!" mumbled Wat, forcing a laugh; "you can't work that kind of a racket on me. I'm not afraid of being

shot, but I didn't know—I kind of thought—that is, I suspected—"

He broke down completely, but his eyes were moving about in a restless manner, as if searching for some one.

"You suspected what?" demanded Frank, sharply. "I fancy I know. You thought Bart Hodge might feel like settling a part of his account against your gang. It is possible he may feel that way. But we are going to try you as a deserter and a spy. As I said before, if you are able to prove your innocence, you shall not be hanged."

Then, directed by Frank, they removed the captive from the hut to the open air, where he was quickly surrounded.

Frank bade the hermit good-day, but Black Tom seemed greatly agitated, and he caught hold of the boy, saying:

"They will come back and keep their word—I know they will!"

"Who—the party that visited you first?"

"Yes."

"I scarcely think there is much danger of that, for they will not be given the opportunity—if I can help it. They are fugitives and deserters from Fardale Academy, and I was sent out to capture them. They will avoid me, if possible."

"Well, I am sure you will be successful in the end; but keep them from returning here if possible. Why, they even threatened to burn my cabin, saying it would be a good thing if I were driven from these parts."

Frank had heard other persons make such a statement, but he did not say so then, for he pitied the wretched old man who lived a hermit's life there in the heart of Ten-Mile Woods.

Leaving the hut, Frank found the cadets gathered about Snell, who now looked thoroughly chagrined and disgusted.

"We will organize an impromptu court-

martial," said Frank. "No time is to be wasted in carrying this matter through."

"Bring out Black Tom," suggested Paul Rains. "We need him as a witness."

"That's right!" cried the boys, those who had remained outside being eager to get a better view of the old hermit.

Frank stepped back to the door of the hut, when, to his amazement, he saw that the place was empty. Black Tom had disappeared in a most surprising manner.

Into the hut Frank plunged, looking around for the old man, for he knew Black Tom had not left the place by the door, which was the only exit.

But the hermit was actually gone, nor was his wretched dog to be seen.

Puzzled and mystified, Frank went out and told the boys of this astonishing disappearance.

The boys could not believe it possible that Black Tom had vanished thus unaccountably, but none of them seemed to care about investigating.

"Pwhoy don't ye go in an' foind th' ould gent, Dutchy?" asked Barney Mulloy, with a sly twinkle in his eyes.

"Say, you come righd avay off, Parney!" exclaimed Hans. "Vy don'd you do him yourself, hey?"

"I'll tell ye one thing," spoke up Ephraim Gallup, as he moved still farther from the cabin; "yeou don't git me inter that air gol dinged hole ag'in, if I know myself! Darned if I don't b'lieve it'd scare me aout of a year's growth to go in there naow."

"Vell, dot peen a goot thing vor you, Ephry," declared Hans. "Uf you grown some taller you don'd peen aple to go der door uf a house in mitoudt knockin' your bompadore down, ain'd id!"

"Well, there's no danger of that so far as you are concerned," laughed Sammy Smiles; "so you are the one to go in, Hans."

"That's right! that's right!" shouted the boys, ready to have some sport with

Hans, who was beginning to quake with apprehension. "You are the one to go in and dig Black Tom out. Go ahead now, and don't be all day about it!"

"Vell, I peen shot if I do!" shouted the Dutch boy, taking to his heels and running at top speed down the old wood-road, while the others of the party were convulsed with laughter.

It did not take Hans long to disappear, and Ephraim Gallup, who had been edging farther and farther from the hut, suddenly said:

"Gol derned if he's goin' to git away like that! I'll jest ketch him an' bring him back."

Then he started after Hans, and the way he handled his long legs added greatly to the merriment of the party.

When this merriment had subsided somewhat, it was resolved to make sure that Black Tom had really disappeared. Many strange tales had been told of the old hermit's astonishing doings, but the boys had never taken much stock in any of them. Frank Merriwell was decidedly skeptical about anything he could not understand, and he still thought it possible Black Tom was concealed somewhere about the hut.

Having selected three companions, Rains, Smiles, and Gray, Frank entered the hut once more, with the trio at his heels.

The interior of the cabin looked the same as it had a few minutes before, but nothing could be seen of the hermit and his dog.

There seemed to be no place of concealment, but the boys began a search, and they carried it out in a very thorough manner, looking into every corner that could have hidden a rat.

At last they were compelled to give up, baffled, and they stood looking at one another in utter bewilderment.

"The man and the dog must have left the hut at our very heels when we went

out in the first place," said Frank. "We did not observe them, and they slipped away into the woods."

"That may be right," acknowledged Sammy Smiles, who was unusually sober for him, "but I think it is mighty queer not one of us saw them come out."

"So it is; but we must accept that as the only possible explanation. They could not have left by that window, for it is too small and too high. The door offers the only means of leaving the hut, and that must be the way they went."

"Well, I motion we leave it, and go on about our business," put in Ned Gray, who had grown decidedly nervous.

Frank led the way to the open air.

Outside another surprise awaited them. Wat Snell had disappeared!

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE SHORE OF THE LAKE.

"What is the meaning of this?" demanded Frank, holding himself in check with an effort. "How did he happen to get away?"

No one knew, it was said. While they had been discussing the surprising vanishing of Black Tom, Snell had found an opportunity to slip into the bushes and make good his escape.

Frank reprimanded them severely for carelessness.

"This is very unfortunate," he said. "Snell will lose no time in joining the rebels, and they will know just where we are. They will be on their guard."

The boys knew this was true, and they felt that they had been guilty of gross carelessness.

"We have already spent too much time here," declared Frank. "Snell must not get too much the start of us."

In a few seconds they were again moving briskly along the old wood-road, leaving the hut of the strange hermit behind.

They had not proceeded far when a great commotion was heard in the bushes, and Ephraim Gallup appeared, dragging Hans Dunnerwust, who was angrily protesting.

"If you don'd let go uf mein person, I vill ged hurt!" cried Hans, threateningly.

"Come erlong, gol ding ye!" roared Ephraim. "Yeou're the biggest gol ding'd scarecrow I ever saw!"

"Oh, you go fall mit yourself off!"

"Come erlong!"

"If you don'd leggo mein person, I been goin' to hit you real hard!"

"Do it if you dast!"

Then Hans punched Ephraim in the pit of the stomach, doubling the Vermonter up like a jack-knife.

"Ow-wow-wow!" howled the country boy, when he could catch his breath. "That warn't no fair! That was below the belt, gol ding ye!"

"Vell," grinned Hans, who thoroughly enjoyed the convulsions of the lank lad, "uf I don't been aple to reach up above der pelt, you vill haf to excuse me."

"Say, you thunderin' Dutchman! d'ye know what I'm goin' to do to you fer this air?"

"Vell, I don'd oxpect I do."

"Well, by gum! I'm gein' to set on you, an' I'm goin' ter set so gol dinger hard that when I git up there won't be nothin' of you left but a grease-spot!"

Ephraim was preparing to go at Hans in earnest, but Frank Merriwell's voice checked further hostilities.

"You may quit that!" he cried. "We've got no time to waste in this way. Wait till we overtake the rebels, and then you may have all the scrapping you want. Fall in!"

They did not dare disobey, and so they fell in, and the little company continued its brisk march toward the lake.

They were not far from the lake, which was soon seen glittering through the trees.

Frank brought the company to a halt,

not believing it best to march boldly out to the shore of the lake, as they might be seen by the deserters.

With Fred Davis as a companion, he went forward, leaving the boys stretched at ease on a mossy spot.

They proceeded cautiously, not knowing but they might come upon the deserters unexpectedly.

At length they came out to the lake, and there they found the smoldering remains of a fire, and every evidence to show that the party they were after had camped there some time before.

It was not far from sunset, and Frank was not at all satisfied with their day's work, for he had expected to overtake and capture Reynolds and his companions that afternoon.

Carefully following up the trail left by the party, the boys found they had taken to the sandy beach, and had turned back toward the edge of the woods.

"They may have sought a camping spot on that point over there," said Frank. "It will be a good plan to reconnoitre."

"If we go along the beach, we may be seen."

"That's true, and so we will keep within the edge of the trees as far as possible. Come on."

Not wishing to waste any time, Frank advanced at a rapid pace, and Fred found it no easy thing to follow. As they approached the point, they halted frequently to listen. Knowing the point must give them a good view along the shore in both directions, Frank led the way out upon it.

Suddenly, from far away beyond the point, came a wild cheer of youthful voices, followed by the heavy report of a gun.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CAPTURE OF THE CAPTAIN KIDD.

"Hullo!" exclaimed Frank. "That's the deserters, and they're up to something. Come on, Davis!"

He started at a run straight across the point, and Fred followed closely. They did not mind the bushes and underbrush and they soon came out on the other side.

To Frank's surprise, they were not far from the edge of the forest, the old wood-road having led them back as it came down to the shore of the lake.

At no great distance lay Sailor Jack's schooner beside the floating pier. The mainsail was up, and it seemed evident that some one had been attempting to get the boat under way. The deck was swarming with lads in the cadet uniform of Fardale Academy.

But there was trouble on board the Captain Kidd, and a glance showed Frank that a struggle was going on.

"Those fellows are trying to get away on the schooner," cried Merriwell. "They must be stopped."

Along the beach he ran, and Davis still followed, wondering how in the world Frank was going to stop ten desperate and determined deserters from sailing away in the schooner.

That was something Frank could not have told himself, but he hoped to find some method of preventing the rebellious cadets from accomplishing their design.

"If they get away it may take a week to overhaul them and bring them back," he thought.

As the boys ran forward, they saw a man who was battling desperately with the lads on the schooner, and he was easily recognized as the owner of the craft, Sailor Jack himself.

It became apparent that he had discovered the boys in the act of appropriating his vessel, and had hastened to prevent the accomplishment of their design, if possible.

But the boys meant to sail away in the Captain Kidd, and, while several were struggling with Sailor Jack, others were casting off and pushing the schooner out from the pier.

The sailor proved himself a desperate fighter, for he flung the boys off as fast as they sprang upon him, and he struck some blows that sent them staggering.

Frank and Fred were seen running along the shore, and the deserters sent up a shout of defiance.

Frank had hoped to reach the schooner before it could swing out from the pier, but the light breeze caught the sail and the craft began to drift away.

That the boys knew little about handling such a vessel was apparent, as they had run up the mainsail first, when the jib or foresail should have been set to swing the head of the schooner.

Seeing Frank approaching, Reynolds was heard to order up every sail, and, with bungling haste, the deserters sought to obey his directions.

"Ten to one they beach her," thought Merriwell. "They will with her heading as she is now."

But the faint breeze blew directly off shore, so no one but the most bungling lubber was liable to beach the schooner. Her sails filled, and she swung away.

At about this time, Bascomb and the fellows who had been struggling with the owner of the schooner succeeded in knocking Jack down and stunning him.

"Over with him!" shouted Bascomb. "Let him swim ashore. We don't want to take him with us."

Then the man was lifted bodily and cast overboard.

It is a singular fact that few sailors are good swimmers, and it is doubtful if

Sailor Jack ever knew how to swim. When cast into the water in the first place he immediately sank from view, and he was beneath the surface some time.

When he came up Jack tried to keep his head above water, but his desperate efforts to do so were baffling to his own hopes, and he went down a second time.

By this time Frank realized that the man could not swim, and was liable to drown.

The schooner had acquired considerable headway, and was at last pointing straight out into the lake. No one on board seemed to be paying much attention to the unfortunate sailor who had been cast overboard.

Out upon the floating pier dashed Frank Merriwell, stripping off his coat as he ran and casting it aside. Not a single instant did he hesitate. Having noted the spot where Sailor Jack had disappeared, he plunged in and swam toward it.

Frank was in time to reach the drowning man as he came up for the last time. Jack had long hair, and the boy fastened his fingers in that, crying:

"Steady, now, and I will save you!"

But Jack was frantic, and without reason, like all drowning persons, and he tried to clutch his would-be rescuer.

Frank fought him off, but found the man so fierce that it was with no small difficulty he could be kept at a distance.

"Keep still!" he repeated over and over. "Stop it, and I will get you out!"

At length, becoming exasperated, he lifted one clinched hand out of the water and struck the old sailor a heavy blow on the temple.

That was enough to daze Jack, and Frank succeeded in swimming with him to the pier, where Fred Davis aided in drawing the man out of the water. Together they carried him ashore.

It was not very long before the sailor began to come round, so Frank decided it was not necessary to labor over him.

In the meantime, the schooner was

bearing the triumphant deserters away, and a wild chorus came from the lips of the reckless crew, growing fainter and fainter with the increasing distance:

"Oh, my name was Captain Kidd,
When I sailed, when I sailed;
And so wickedly I did,
When I sailed, when I sailed."

Frank was thoroughly disgusted with the result of the day's pursuit of the deserters. They had not been overtaken, and they were sailing away jubilantly, triumphantly.

Sailor Jack sat up and shook his fist after the schooner, gurgling in his throat:

"May I be keelhauled if I don't get even with ye, you lubbers! Steal my schooner, will ye? I'll pay you back in your own coin, and you may lay to that, my hearties!"

Then he looked at Frank and Fred in a dazed sort of way.

"Why ain't you with 'em?" he asked.

"We do not belong to that gang," replied Frank.

"But you are dressed like 'em."

"They are the party we are pursuing."

"The mutineers?"

"Yes."

"They threw me overboard, and I came near going to Davy Jones' locker."

"Rather."

"You pulled me out?"

"I did."

"Well, shiver my timbers if I forget it, mate! It's the first good turn any human being has done me in years, and I'll remember it. What's your name?"

"Frank Merriwell."

"Well, Frank Merriwell, give us your fin, and may you get your grog reg'ler till you take your last cruise to that country from which no sailor ever ships again. No, I won't forget that you done a good turn for Old Jack."

"I wish you might have taken the time and attention of those fellows two min-

utes longer," said Frank. "That would have given me time to reach the schooner."

"I done my best, mate. I was at the house when I first saw them around the Kidd. I took my old gun and made for her as fast as I could. They saw me coming, and tried to get her away; but they couldn't do it. I tried to scare the lubbers off with the gun, but shiver my timbers if they would go! Then I boarded her, and in the scrimmage the old gun went off. I fought them till they threw me over, and you know the rest."

"I wonder where they are going?" speculated Frank.

He wrung some of the water out of his clothes, and they watched the schooner till it swung round an island that lay about a mile away. She was not seen again, and Sailor Jack said it was evident the deserters intended to pass the night on the island.

"Is there no way of getting over to them to-night?" asked Frank. "If boats could be found to carry my company——"

"I can find ye two boats, mate, and they'll take five men each."

"Where are they?"

"Within a mile of here."

"Can you get them and bring them here within two hours?"

"Keelhaul me if I can't!"

"Do it, and I will pay you well."

"I don't want any pay, mate; but I'd like to get my vessel back."

"Well, I'll help you do that."

"Then I'll be on hand with the boats, and you may lay to that."

"And I'll be on hand with all the men they will carry," assured Frank. "Reynolds and his gang shall not pass a peaceful night on the island."

After a few more words, Frank and Fred left the old sailor, hastened back to join the boys who were still waiting in the woods.

The sun dropped down in the west, and

darkness was coming on when Frank rejoined his company.

The boys were all eager to know where he had been, but he did not remain there while relating his adventure. Without delay he got the party in motion, and marched them back along the old wood-road, past the hut of the hermit, which seemed dark and deserted, and reached the highway through the forest.

During the march he told them what had happened, and gave his plan for following the deserters when they had taken supper at the old farm-house.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BATTLE ON THE ISLAND.

Two hours later the entire party was at Sailor Jack's floating pier.

They found Jack waiting for them with the boats.

Frank selected eight companions to accompany him, the sailor being the ninth. Barney, Hans, and Ephraim were eager to go along, and Frank accepted them.

Hodge was placed in charge of one boat, and Frank took the other. Preparations were made for muffling the oars when they came near the island, and they pulled off from the pier.

For all that it was a decidedly dark night, Sailor Jack found no difficulty in piloting them over the lake directly toward the island.

By the time half the distance was made they could hear shouting and singing on the island, which made it evident that the deserters were enjoying themselves.

From the time that they first heard these sounds there was no difficulty in bearing straight toward the island.

It seemed quite unnecessary to muffle the oars, but Frank saw that the precaution was taken, and they slipped noiselessly up to the shore of the island.

Having secreted the boats where it seemed certain they would remain safely concealed until wanted, Frank led the way toward the point from whence the singing and shouting came.

Passing through a thick growth of timber and bushes, they saw a camp-fire gleaming before them.

"They're in the old fort," whispered the sailor.

"What's the old fort?" asked Frank.

"It's a circular wall of stones on that little elevation, and nobody knows why she were built there or who built her."

"Well, fort or no fort, we're going to attempt the capture of that gang."

The deserters had built two large fires, the light of which revealed their surroundings plainly, and shone out on the water of a deep cove that made into the island on that side. The schooner lay in the cove, close to the shore, so close, in fact, that a long plank had been run from her deck to the top of a low bluff.

Frank's first move was to pass round the camp of the deserters, and get between them and the vessel.

It was easy enough to pass round the camp, but it was not so easy to cut them off from the schooner without being seen.

Believing Reynolds and his companions would be overwhelmed by a sudden attack, Frank made every arrangement, and, at a signal decided upon, the cadets gave the academy yell and charged.

But the deserters had prepared for such an emergency. They leaped up behind the low wall of the fort, and Reynolds was heard to shout:

"Stones, boys—stones! Give it to 'em!"

Then a shower of stones flew at Frank and his party.

"Shimuminy Gristmas!" howled Hans Dunnerwust "I vos kildt alretty yet! I vos hit der small uf der stomach a sdene mit! Ouch! Dunder und blitzens!"

"Shut up your tarnal towse!" cried

Ephraim Gallup. "You make more fuss — We-ow! My leg is broke! I can't step on it! Don't throw any more stones this way! I'll surrender!"

The first volley of stones served to check the rush somewhat, but Frank, hit three times, kept to the front, shouting:

"Forward! Drive them out, and then we've got 'em! Come on, lads!"

"I'm with you!" assured Bart Hodge.

The words had barely left Bart's lips when he was struck in the head by a stone, and fell heavily to the ground.

Frank saw Bart go down, and he paused a moment. Then he realized that his party had turned and were taking to their heels.

An exclamation of anger came from Frank Merriwell's lips, but he saw he could not check his demoralized company. The deserters had prepared to fight if they were followed, and the volleys of stones were too much for the attacking company.

Frank caught Bart up and, flinging his limp comrade over his shoulder, hurried away into the darkness beyond the reach of any stones that could be thrown from the fort.

Merriwell was thoroughly angered by the manner in which his comrades had fled before the shower of stones, but he held himself in check, believing in controlling and governing his temper.

However, when he found the cadets huddling in the darkness nursing various wounds, he expressed his amazement at the readiness with which they were repulsed.

But he was concerned over Bart, for an injury such as Hodge had received might prove serious.

In a few seconds, however, Bart showed signs of returning consciousness, and he finally struggled to a sitting posture, holding his head with his hands, and groaning.

"I beheld more fire-works than were ever seen at any Fourth of July celebration," he declared. "Murder! how my head aches!"

When he found the deserters had beaten them off, he did not hesitate to express his feelings freely and forcibly.

Suddenly a cry of consternation came from the deserters, and the light of the fires showed Sailor Jack on board the schooner. The old salt had drawn in the plank, and was getting up the jib. That it was his intention to make sail and get away with the vessel as soon as possible became evident.

The deserters were thrown into a state of dismay, but Reynolds was heard to shout:

"Out, boys, out! Don't let him get off with the schooner! We are trapped if he does!"

Out of the fort came the deserters, some of them stumbling and falling in their haste to reach the Captain Kidd.

"Now is our time, lads!" said Frank, in a low, distinct tone. "Jack has pulled in the plank, and the schooner has swung off a little. They will not succeed in reaching her. Follow me, and we will take and hold the fort. That will turn the tables on those fellows, and force them to surrender."

For all of his aching head, Hodge was on his feet in a moment, and the other boys were eager to carry out Frank's plan.

Merriwell held them in check long enough to let the deserters get a considerable distance from the fort. Then came the low, sharp order:

"Forward! Follow me!"

They made a dash to cut off the deserters, and the movement was successful, not being discovered till they were nearly into the fort.

By that time the deserters saw they could not reach the schooner, and they realized the tables had been turned on them.

"Back, lads—back to the fort!" cried Rupert, in consternation. "We'll have to fight for it, but we mustn't let those fellows hold it."

Into the fort leaped Frank, with his friends close behind him. His eyes fell on the little heaps of round stones that had been gathered for the purpose of defending the fort, and his voice rang out:

"Here's our ammunition, fellows! Beat 'em off, as they did us! Hurrah! We've got 'em!"

He set the example by catching up a stone in each hand and turning to send them whizzing at the charging foe.

The other lads were not slow to catch on, and now Reynolds and his crowd faced a volley that drove them back precipitately, and sent them scampering into the darkness.

The victors gave the academy yell, and gave it with a will.

The defeat of the deserters now seemed complete, for they had left provisions, guns, and so forth, on board the schooner, and Merriwell had turned the tables on them.

"Vell," observed Hans Dunnerwurst, "uf dis don'd peen a regular war, you vos a liar. You pet me your life I vos going to abby vor a bension."

"It strikes me those fellows will have to surrender unconditionally," said Frank.

There was a lull of a few moments. It was impossible to tell what the enemy was doing, but Frank more than half expected Reynolds was making preparations to lead another charge on the fort.

But the minutes slipped away, and the charge did not come.

Frank began to grow uneasy. Finally he said:

"Seven can hold this fort as well as nine. Come on, Bart, let's go on a scouting expedition."

"I am with you," assured Hodge. "Lead the way."

Frank leaped over the wall of the fort and ran like a deer into the darkness, followed by Bart. Of course they were not sure they would not run straight into the

clutches of the enemy, but they took their chances on it.

Nothing of the kind occurred.

As soon as they were concealed by the darkness, Frank halted and said:

"I have a feeling that something is wrong, Bart."

"Same here. Those fellows are altogether too still."

"We will soon find out. Come on."

Frank led the way, and it did not take them long to reach the shore where they had left the two boats.

But the boats were not there!

And far out on the bosom of the lake came the sound of working oars!

CHAPTER IX.

A SHRIEK FROM THE FLAMES.

"Tricked!" gasped Frank.

"Beaten!" palpitated Bart.

"Those fellows have found our boats and gotten away in them!"

"Sure."

There was a moment of dismayed and disgusted silence, and then Frank slowly said:

"I was afraid of it. Sailor Jack is gone with the schooner, and we are beautifully trapped. Oh, but won't Reynolds and Bascomb chuckle in their sleeves. How they ever found those boats is a mystery; it must have been by sheer accident."

It was a bitter pill to swallow, but the only thing they could do was to make the best of it. To make sure they were not mistaken, they searched along the shore for the boats, but it was a waste of time. The boats were gone beyond a doubt.

Never in all his life had Frank Merriwell felt more disgusted than he did at that moment. He had taken pains to conceal the boats, and the rebels had stumbled on them by pure blundering luck. A short time before it had seemed that the

deserters were well overtaken and defeated in such a manner that they would soon be forced to surrender, but now—

"I hate to go back and tell the boys the truth," said Frank.

Bart groaned. He was fully as disgusted as Frank.

There was nothing to do but return to the fort and make the situation known, and this they proceeded to do. Frank braced up and assumed a careless air, laughing heartily as he told how they had been tricked.

"Great gosh all thutteration!" fluttered Ephraim Gallup. "You don't mean to say we are left here on this gol dinged islan', an' we ain't got no way of gittin' ashore?"

"Oh, there is a way to get ashore all right," smiled Frank.

"Haow?"

"Swim."

"Shimminy Gristmas!" gurgled Hans. "Vot you dink we peen—vish?"

After a time the boys recovered sufficiently to laugh over the affair, which they were inclined to accept as a good joke on themselves, and let it go at that.

"The fellows we left on shore will get us off some way in the morning," assured Frank. "We can raise a signal of distress, and that will bring them over."

So they made preparations to spend the night on the island.

While they were thus engaged an exclamation of surprise and relief came from Frank, who sprang up on a large stone, standing in the full light of the fires, and waving his cap about his head, while he cried:

"Schooner ahoy!"

The light of the fires showed them the Captain Kidd swinging round in the little cove, with Sailor Jack at the helm.

"Ay, ay, sir," called back the old tar. "What's happened on the island?"

"We're castaway—marooned—Robin Crusoe," Frank replied. "Those de-

serters have escaped in our boats, and left us here."

The sailor was surprised, but he recognized Frank, and he knew there could be no trick about it, so he brought the schooner into the deep water that allowed her to lay close to the bluff. Frank and Bart were on hand to catch the line that was cast ashore, and then the plank was run out, and the relieved and delighted boys walked aboard.

"I thought I would lay into the cove and see how things were going," said the old salt. "I didn't think of finding you in this scrape, my hearties."

Frank explained how it came about, using as few words as possible.

"It's a good thing for us you cruised round this way again," he said, in conclusion. "We were making preparations to spend the night on the island."

"Well, it'll take me some time to set you ashore," said Jack, "for I'll have to beat her up against the wind, which is not very strong. If it holds till we make the pier we'll be in luck."

The plank had been drawn in, and the boys pushed the Captain Kidd off with oars till some flaws of wind cut down into the cove and gave her start enough so she slowly worked her way out into open water, where there was a better breeze.

It was indeed a long, wearisome task of beating the schooner up against the wind, but Old Jack was sailor enough to take advantage of everything, and, two hours after leaving the island, they were beating past the edge of Ten-Mile Woods on their "last leg." Through an opening in the trees they caught a glimpse of a campfire, around which a party of lads were gathered.

"They must be Reynolds and his gang," said Frank. "I do not believe the fellows we left on shore would have come away over there to camp."

When the pier was reached the rest of the party was found still waiting them

there, so it was settled beyond a doubt that the campers in the woods were the rebels they had come out to capture.

"It is quite probable they believe themselves safe, and they will not be expecting us," said Frank. "We must lose no time in falling on them."

In a very few minutes the entire company was marching briskly along the beach, determined to end the hunt as soon as possible.

Beyond the wooded point they came upon the boats, which had been drawn out upon the beach, and they soon saw the fire gleaming through the trees.

Frank proposed to creep up on the deserters and surround them, so they began stealing forward through the woods, making as little noise as possible.

Each cadet was now armed with a gun, to which a bayonet was set, and it was Frank's scheme to form a circle of steel about the rebels, so there could be no escape for any of them, unless they chose to rush straight upon a bayonet.

The camp-fire had died down, and an awesome silence reigned in the forest. The boys were forced to proceed very slowly, in order not to make noise enough to alarm the enemy.

In this way considerable time was spent in getting near enough to the fire to discover that there seemed to be no one in the vicinity. A fear that he had been fooled again came upon Frank, and he hastened on with less caution.

In a few moments the boys were gathered by the fire, looking inquiringly into each other's faces.

"Vere dey vos, ain'd id?" asked the puzzled Dutch lad. "Dey don'd been here so much as dey vos yet avile, I belieff me."

"They are gone," said Frank, reluctantly; "but I do not believe they were warned of our coming in any way."

"Perhaps they were," said Bart. "It is

possible they had a spy watching the pier to see when the Captain Kidd arrived."

"It is possible," Merriwell admitted. "Perhaps they decided to get out of the woods. The old wood-road is near, and they must have gone that way."

After a brief consultation with Bart, Frank decided to take the wood-road and follow it to the main highway.

It was dark in the forest, but Frank seemed to have the eyes of an owl, for he led them to the road without difficulty, and they were soon tramping along in an irregular line.

"The saints defend us!" muttered Barney. "We've got to pass th' hut av th' ould hermit!"

"What's that ere light ahead there?" asked Ephraim Gallup. "It's gittin' brighter an' brighter. B'gosh! it looks like a fire!"

"It is a fire!" cried Frank, as the glaring light grew stronger. "It is a burning building, at that! It must be the hut of the hermit! Forward, boys, forward!"

Away they rushed, and in a very few moments they came out into the little opening where the hermit's hut stood. The wretched hovel was on fire, and the flames were breaking through the roof, lighting the surroundings.

As the boys broke into the opening the light of the fire showed them that the deserters were collected near the hut, watching the fire, but making no attempt to extinguish it. Indeed, they were laughing and shouting for Black Tom to come out and show himself.

Frank and his company were right upon the deserters before they were detected. Then Frank shouted:

"Surrender! You cannot escape!"

Reynolds and Bascomb were astonished, for they fancied Frank was still on the island, from which he would not be likely to escape till morning. Their bewilderment made it possible for Frank's party to cut them off on three sides, while the

burning cabin hemmed them in on the fourth.

Bascomb wanted to fight, but the spirit seemed to go out of Reynolds in a twinkling, and he said:

"You've caught us fast this time, Merriwell. We'll have to surrender."

"You fool!" snarled Bascomb. "We can all get away! Come, make a break! Follow me!"

He dashed fiercely at the line, but the hard fist of Ephraim Gallup, propelled by the country boy's muscular arm, smote the bully on the jaw, and Bascomb went to the ground in a heap—knocked out!

"You don't want to run up ag'in that air bunch of bones, 'less ye like to hurt yerself!" grinned Ephraim. "One thump of that fist means sickness, an' one thump of this one means a job for the undertaker."

The manner in which Bascomb was disposed of instantly checked all disposition to rush so far as the deserters were concerned, and it seemed that their capture was easily accomplished.

"What was the cause of this fire?" asked Frank.

"Oh, we thought we'd give the old hermit a house-warming," laughed Rupert Reynolds.

"What's that?" cried Frank, catching him by the arm. "What do you mean by that?"

Reynolds drew back a bit, muttering:

"You needn't crush a fellow's arm off!"

Frank shook him fiercely.

"What did you mean by your words?" he demanded, in a tone that made Reynolds shiver. "Do you mean to say you set that hut afire?"

"What if we did? We couldn't do a better thing for this section. Everybody is afraid of Black Tom, and the people would like to see him driven away."

"And so you set fire to the only home the poor old man has! That was a brave

and manly thing to do! You should feel proud of yourself!"

Rupert cowered before Merriwell's withering scorn. The laughter was gone from his face, and he choked with anger and fear, as Frank's eyes seemed to bore him through and through.

With an exclamation of disgust, Frank flung Rupert aside; but a second later he had the fellow by the arm again, as he swiftly asked:

"Where is Black Tom?"

"I don't know," was the sullen answer.

"Did you look for him?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"We called for him to come out of the hut."

"Well?"

"He did not answer."

"What then?"

"We went in to look for him."

"What did you find?"

"Nothing but his miserable dog."

"And so you set the hut afire! A fine thing to do!"

"Oh, the dog flew at us, snarling and snapping, and we took some brands from the fire and flung them at the creature. They set the hut afire. That's all there is to it."

"But you made no attempt to put the fire out, so you are responsible. It is an outrage for which you should be punished."

Reynolds hung his head, looked sullen, and said nothing.

Suddenly the boys were startled and electrified by hearing a wild cry that seemed to come from the heart of the burning hut.

"What was that?" asked Bart Hodge, breathlessly. "It sounded like a human cry of agony."

"But it wasn't," declared one of the deserters. "There was no human being

in that old hut. It must have been Black Tom's dog. The creature——”

He was interrupted by another cry that was so weird and wild that it made the hair stand on the heads of the appalled boys.

“By heavens!” shouted Hodge. “That was no dog! It was a human cry of distress! There is a human being in there. The hermit—the old man is burning to death in that fire!”

CHAPTER X.

FRANK MERRIWELL'S FATE.

The horrified lads seemed turned to stone. They stood and stared at the burning hut, appalled beyond measure.

The thought that a human being was perishing in that fire seemed to rob every lad of strength and nerve.

No, not every one!

“It must be the hermit!” rang out the voice of Frank Merriwell. “It would be as bad as murder to leave him there! He must be saved!”

He started toward the hut, but Fred Davis caught hold of him, crying:

“No, no—it can't be done! Look! The hut is all afire! No one can go in there and come out alive!”

For the third time that wild shriek of agony came from the heart of the flames.

In the twinkling of an eye, Frank hurled Davis aside, and then he dashed straight at the fire-wreathed door-way of the old hut. The horror-stricken lads saw him bend his head and plunge straight into the hut, seeming to disappear beyond a curtain of fire.

Fred Davis staggered, and seemed on the point of fainting as he gasped:

“That's the last of him! We'll never see anything of Frank Merriwell again till his bones are exhumed from the ashes!”

“I am afraid you're right,” came

hoarsely from the lips of Bart Hodge. “It does not seem possible for any human being to go in there and come out alive.”

The boys waited and watched, while the seconds passed and the flames infolded the entire hut. But Frank did not reappear, and hope soon turned to despair in the hearts of his comrades. In silence they stood around and watched the fire fiend complete his work. The roof of the hut fell in, sending up a great cloud of sparks, some of which must have set the woods afire but for the fact that there had been several days of rain shortly before, so the forest was not in a dry state. The walls tumbled in, sending up more sparks, the fire died down, and the embers began to smoke.

All hope had long been dead, but still the boys lingered and stared into the embers, although they feared what might be discovered there.

One or two of the lads turned away to conceal their emotions, and some of the deserters began whispering among themselves. Bascomb had recovered in time to see Frank plunge into the burning hut, and he seemed the only one who was not affected.

“He's gone for good now!” the bully whispered to Reynolds. “Merriwell will never trouble us again.”

Rupert drew back from Bascomb.

“Yes, he is gone,” was his admission; “but I find very little satisfaction in that.”

“Oh, what's the matter with you?” sneered the big fellow. “You make me sick!”

“And you make me disgusted!” returned Reynolds. “I feel like a murderer, for we started that fire.”

“That's right,” put in Wat Snell; “but we didn't know Merriwell was going to jump into it like a fool.”

“He made a brave, though foolish, attempt to rescue the old man.”

“Perhaps the hermit was not in that

fire at all. You know it is said he has the power of appearing and disappearing at will. He may have made that cry seem to come from the flames for the very purpose of leading some one to rush in. Maybe that was his scheme to get even with us for burning his hut."

"Boys," said Reynolds, "do you know we are in a pretty bad scrape?"

"How?"

"Why, this whole affair will count against us. We fired the hut, and so we brought about Merriwell's death."

"Rot!" broke in Bascomb. "Your blood is poor; you need a tonic."

"And you were the one who led us into this business, anyway," said Wat Snell. "You hired us to help get Bascomb out of the guard-tent, and—"

"I wish I had left him there!"

"And let me tell why I thumped you?"

"Yes!" flashed Rupert. "It would have been much better for me if I had let you blow the whole matter."

"You would have been dismissed for your little trick of squirting hartshorn into Merriwell's face during the hundred yards dash on field day."

"And you would have taken the same medicine for blackmail," Reynolds shot back. "You have blackmailed me ever since that time, and I have paid you more than two hundred dollars to keep still. When I refused to cough up seventy-five dollars all in a lump, and called you a blackmailer, you jumped on me and hammered me. That's the truth of the matter, boys, and I feel better now that I have let the whole thing out."

Reynolds was desperate and defiant, and he would not be checked, although Bascomb made several attempts to choke him off.

"Well, you've shown yourself up in good shape!" sneered the bully.

"Begobs, Oi think he has shown you up a great dale better, me b'y!" broke in Barney Mulloy, who had been listening.

"It was Frank Merriwell that knew th' thriek all th' toime, an' nivver opened his mouth about it. Av Reynolds had jist mintioned how th' land layed, Merriwell would av put a shtopper on Bascomb's toong. Betwane yez ye hiv had a hand in th' murther av wan av th' b'ys that ivver brathed, rest his saoul!"

Reynolds nodded.

"I believe it," he muttered, thickly. "I don't know that Merriwell ever did me a bad turn, and I have hated him and worked against him ever since he entered the academy. I feel like a cur, and—"

He broke down. Believing that he had been instrumental in bringing about Frank's death, he was overcome with self-repugnance and remorse. For the first time in his life, Reynolds began to realize that his own character was most despicable. When a lad perceives faults in himself, and is ashamed of himself on that account, there is hope for him.

Bascomb longed to give Reynolds another thumping, and once more he sneered:

"You make me sick!"

"You are likely to be a great deal more so before this matter is settled," said Bart Hodge, who had been overcome by the events of the last half-hour. "You are a fellow who is no good on earth, and Fardale Academy can well get along without you. One of Fran Merriwell's fingers was worth a thousand such creatures as you! Close your mouth! If you make a reply, I'll have you tied up to a tree, and flogged, as you wanted me flogged!"

Bascomb was cowed into silence, but his eyes told of the bitter rage within his soul.

CHAPTER XI.

LAST WORDS WITH THE HERMIT.

It was a sorrowful party that carried the news of Frank Merriwell's fate back to Fardale Academy—news which produced unbounded horror and grief, and caused Professor Scotch to break down and weep like a child.

The humbled, trembling deserters went along quietly, quaking with fear, for they knew not what punishment might fall upon them, as their reckless rebellion had brought about the tragedy.

How happy they would have been could they have known Frank Merriwell was not dead—was not seriously injured!

When Frank rushed into the burning cabin he was determined to save the old hermit if he could find him. In his heart he felt that his rebellious comrades would be guilty of murder if Black Tom perished in the fire they had set.

The heat scorched his face and hands, but he held his breath, dashing straight into the cabin, going it blindly, as it were. He depended in a great measure on being guided to the old man by fate.

The smoke was dense inside the hut, and tongues of red-yellow flames reached out and tried to wind about him. He put out his hands like one gone blind, feeling here and there in his search for the man. Ten thousand fiery demons seemed to surround him and hem him in, and then—

It seemed that the world fell away beneath his feet. There was a great shock and a blank.

When Frank recovered consciousness he was lying in a dark, hot place, with a smell of smoke strong in his nostrils. The air was so heavy that he breathed with difficulty, and he groaned a bit when he made the first effort to move.

Then a hand came and touched his face—a bony, skinny hand, and a muffled voice said :

"So you are coming round. I thought you could not be hurt very bad."

It was the voice of Black Tom!

That voice brought everything back to him. He remembered the burning hut, the shrieks of agony, his mad rush to the rescue, and the fall and shock.

"But I am not burned to death," he mumbled. "It is hot here, and I smell smoke; but I am not burned."

"You may find your face and hands are scorched some, but that is all," said the voice of the hermit.

He put out his hand and touched a wall of stone. It seemed that he could almost feel the darkness.

"Where am I?" he asked.

"You are safe from the fire."

"That is evident, but it does not answer my question. You are Black Tom, and you did not perish in the burning hut."

"For which I have no cause to thank your friends. They burned my home, and—"

"The ones who did that have never been very friendly to me, although it is true that they are fellow cadets."

"You had no hand in setting the fire?"

"I should say not!" returned Frank, indignantly. "I am not up to that kind of business!"

"I knew it. I read your character correctly in the first place."

Frank had struggled to a sitting posture. He placed his back against the wall of stone, but the heat and smoke were stronger when he did so.

"We cannot be far from the fire," he said. "You have not answered my question. Where are we?"

"In the passage that leads to my cellar," replied the strange man.

"Well, that beats me! I didn't know

you had any cellar; I thought the floor of your hut was the solid ground."

"So it seemed."

"But it was not built thus?"

"No. The hut was built years ago by an escaped convict, who lived here in the woods till he died. He made the cellar, and he constructed it for a place of concealment in case he should be pursued and cornered by the officers. Heavy timbers were used to roof over the cellar, and these timbers were covered with thin, flat rocks. Then the dirt was placed on the rocks, and made to a level with the ground outside the hut. This made it seem that there was no cellar, and that the hut was built on the solid ground."

Frank Merriwell felt that he was dreaming. It was like an extract from some marvelous story, and he pinched himself to make sure that he was truly awake.

"In order to have means of getting into the cellar," continued the harsh voice of the hermit, "he left an opening up through. This he covered with a large flat stone, which worked on hinges, like a trap-door. This stone was immediately in front of the fire-place, and seemed like a hearth. Below the stone he placed a ladder that ran straight down into the cellar. Any one in the cellar could fasten the stone so it could not be lifted without the aid of levers, if some one above should take a notion to see if there was something worth looking at beneath it."

"That fellow was a genius," commented Frank.

"He was resolved not to be caught and penned in the cellar," the strange man went on, "and so he excavated a passage from the cellar to the heart of a thick mass of shrubbery a short distance from the hut. We are in that passage now."

"All this is quite astonishing," admitted Frank; "but how do I happen to be here?"

"Shortly before my home was set afire," continued the harsh voice of the

hermit, "I heard cries outside. A crowd was calling for me to come out. I have seen such mobs. I nursed the man who built this hut; I was with him when he died, and I buried him here in the woods. He told me the secret of the cellar and the passage, and I have lived here since. But many times people have come in mobs to drive me away. They hate me, and they will not let me live in peace. Some of them said I was the escaped convict. I heard them shouting outside to-night, and I quickly descended into the cellar."

"I fancy that cellar has enabled you to appear in a manner that was most baffling and mysterious."

"It has mystified not a few people, but it will never aid me more, for, with the coming of another day, Black Tom will move on once more. The people about here will be satisfied, as they will succeed at last in driving me away. Where I may go I know not, but I am afraid to stay here longer."

"As I said, I descended into the cellar, and there I remained till I fancied my enemies must be gone. Then I lifted the trap and made the terrible discovery that my home was burning. I cried out in anguish—I called to my dog. Then I saw you come rushing blindly through the smoke, with the glare of the fire yellow on your face, and I recognized you."

"I heard your cries; I sought to save you."

"I knew that must be it. You were blinded by the smoke, and you staggered directly over the opening. I barely had time to get out of the way when you plunged into the cellar."

"That was when it seemed that everything fell out from beneath my feet."

"My dog came, I saw my home was doomed, and I closed down the trap. Then, the heat growing strong, I dragged you into the passage, where we are at this moment."

"And the rest of the boys must think I

met my fate in the burning hut. They must believe me dead."

"Fate has something far better in store for you than such a death."

"I am glad to hear it," said Frank, with a grim smile in the dark.

"After this night, it is not probable that you will ever again look on the face of Black Tom; but you will not forget him?"

"I am not likely to, and I shall not forget that some fellows who wear uniforms like my own burned his home. It is a shame! To-morrow—or to-day, if midnight is past, and it must be—I will do my best to raise a fund among the students at Fardale Academy, enough to enable you to rebuild your cabin. I will keep secret the truth concerning this cellar, and you may continue to live here in peace."

"No," was the sad return; "it is ordained that I shall remain here no longer. I appreciate your kindness; but Ten-Mile Woods will know Black Tom no more."

It was useless for Frank to talk of it; he had made up his mind, and nothing could change it. He refused to wait till money was collected to pay him for the destruction of his home.

"Come," said Frank, when he felt that his strength was greatly restored, "lead the way to the open air. The air is foul in here, and I cannot stand it longer."

"We will go forth if your companions have departed," said the hermit. "All I ask is that they be punished for a little time by supposing you have been destroyed in the fire."

They crept along the narrow passage, Frank finding it necessary to crouch low, and finally came to some rude stone steps, which led up into the heart of a tangled mass of bushes and small trees. Frank drew in long breaths of the cool night air, and was very thankful for his escape from death.

Of the hut nothing but a glowing mass

of embers remained, and the cadets had departed.

At parting but few words passed between the boy and the strange man, whose dog had followed them from the secret cellar. Black Tom bade him go, and he left the man standing in the reddish glow of his ruined home. Before passing from view along the wood-road, he looked back. The hermit was darkly outlined against the light of the dying embers. The dog was crouching at his heels.

That was the last Frank Merriwell ever saw of Black Tom.

CHAPTER XII.

FROM THE HANDS OF FRIENDS.

As he thought about the hermit's strange story, Frank came to the belief that Black Tom was the escaped convict, although the old man had stated the convict was dead.

On his way to camp he soon found himself passing the home of Sailor Jack.

He wondered if the old sailor were still watching on board the Captain Kidd, or if he had come home and gone to bed.

Frank felt a strong desire to know about this, and, almost before he was aware that he had left the road, he was close to the house. He paused, wondering what had brought him there.

"I'm afraid it wouldn't be very healthy for any one to be rapping around this place at this time of night," he thought. "Jack might come out with his old gun and do some shooting."

Glancing round the corner, Frank fancied he saw a gleam of light that came from a window near the back of the house. This aroused his curiosity, and he cautiously and silently made his way round to the window.

He was not mistaken. There was a curtain at the window, but a lower corner was torn away, and a light shone out.

In a moment Frank was peering into the room.

What he saw made him gasp with astonishment and incredulity.

"Am I dreaming?" flashed through his brain. "I must be! This is not really happening!"

He found himself looking into a wretched room, where, on the floor, lay Sailor Jack, securely bound and gagged. There were two other men in the room, and their faces were hidden by black masks.

One of the men was heating an iron poker in the open fire. The other was talking to the old sailor, and the boy outside could understand his words.

"We know ye've got a heap of money stowed away somewhere, me covie, an' we're goin' ter have it—see! We know ye found a buried pirate's treasure, an' we're goin' ter make yer cough it up. We mean biz, an' we're bad men ter monkey wid. Me pal is heatin' der iron ter warm up yer lonesome Trilby wid, an' we'll have yer boodle if we have ter burn yer leg off inch by inch clean ter yer body. Yer might as well cough before we begin. If ye'll give up der swag, wink yer right eye; if yer won't, wink yer left eye."

The man looked into Jack's face, and then he cried:

"Left she is! Bring on der poker, pal."

He jerked off the sailor's boot and stocking, and the other man approached with a red-hot iron.

A groan came from behind the gag in the sailor's mouth.

Shuddering with horror, Frank turned away.

"The monsters!" thought the boy. "I don't propose to see that man tortured and robbed! What can I do?"

He sought for a heavy club that would serve as a weapon of assault, and, in a few seconds he found what he desired.

Then he came back to the window and looked in again.

The old sailor was writhing with pain, and one of the men was heating the poker again.

Evidently the wretches had applied the iron once.

"Dat's a taste," said the man who had spoken before. "Next time we'll give yer a lunch, an' dat'll be foller'd by a square meal. Don't be a fool! We're tender-heated as chickens, an' we don't want ter hurt yer 'less ye make us. Just tell where der boodle is hid, an' we won't burn yer no more. Wot d'yer say?"

Sailor Jack shook his head.

"Come on wid der tickler, pal!" cried the spokesman.

The man with the poker took it from the fire and again approached the helpless cripple.

Frank decided that the time for action had come. With a single blow of the club he held he shattered the window, smashing in sash, glass, and all.

Like a flash, the young athlete leaped through the opening he had thus made, and was within the room.

The masked men had started to escape, not knowing but a large number of assailants were right upon them.

Before they could get out of the room, Frank brought the club down on the head of one of them, knocking him senseless.

Then the boy caught the other fellow by the collar and flung him back into the room, crying:

"You shall not get away, you villain!"

The man staggered, retained his balance with some difficulty, and then, seeing Frank was followed by no others, whipped out a wicked-looking knife, snarling:

"Ten thousand fiends! Do you dare tackle us alone, yer fool? Why, I'll jest tap yer, an' let yer claret out—see!"

He leaped at Frank, with the glittering knife uplifted.

The boy sprang aside, and down came the club once more. The ruffian threw up

one arm to shield his head but it dropped, broken, at his side, and he was sent reeling. Before he could recover, the brave boy stretched him senseless beside his pal.

"Hurrah!" shouted Frank, as he caught up the ruffian's knife and hastened to set Sailor Jack free. "That was the way to cook 'em!"

The sailor sat up, working his jaws to get the cramp out of them. When he could speak, he said:

"Shiver my timbers if I ever saw anything like that! Boy, you're a wonder—a cyclone, tornado, simoon! Do you know what you've done? I believe these two lubbers are One-Thumb Harris and Slippery Goggs, two professional burglars, for whose capture there's a reward of three hundred dollars each offered, keelhaul me if I don't! You'll get the reward if I'm right, and I won't forget you myself. You may lay to that, my lad."

* * * * *

The old sailor was right; the captured ruffians proved to be the burglars for whom the rewards were offered, and, in due course of time, the money came into Frank's hands.

Both Frank and Sailor Jack were interviewed by numerous newspaper reporters, and the story of the boy's daring single-handed attack upon and capture of the ruffians who were torturing the sailor was published broadcast, scores of papers containing Frank's picture.

The astonishment and unutterable joy created by Frank's safe return to the academy may be much better imagined than described. He was hailed as one risen from the dead, the encampment went mad with joy, his hand was nearly shaken off, he was hugged, he was lifted

on strong shoulders and borne round and round the camp, followed by every cadet of the academy, all of them laughing, shouting, cheering, and singing. The band quickly assembled, and headed the procession, a salute was fired from the artillery in use at the school, and Professor Gunn made a speech, filled with thanksgiving and praise for Frank. Little Professor Scotch tried to say something, but he broke down and embraced Frank, while the tears of joy ran down his face, and another wild cyclone of cheers went up from the cadets.

Such a scene had never before been witnessed at Fardale. No outside spectator could have dreamed Frank Merriwell had ever found a foe amid that rejoicing throng.

The deserters were severely punished in the way of demerit and extra duties, with curtailed privileges, but none of them were dismissed.

Three weeks later Sailor Jack was attacked by a sudden and severe illness, of which he died in three days. He sent for Frank before the end, and, putting a paper into the boy's hand, said:

"They say I'm goin' to ship for a long voyage, my lad. I can't take my money along. You're the only person who's showed any kindness to me of late, and keelhaul me if I don't leave every cent of my money to you! It's an old pirate's treasure I located and dug up on Long Island. Just what it amounts to, I don't rightly know. That paper's my will, and I've had it fixed right by a lawyer. Here's another paper that tells where to find the money. I intended to die without ever tellin' anybody where it was hid, but I

feel better that I've found somebody that's well was known to be worth over forty thousand dollars.

that."

So the old sailor died, and Frank was chief mourner at the funeral. The treasure was found where it was hidden, and, when its value was ascertained, Frank Merri-

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